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SUBJECT: ALGERIAN SENIOR MFA OFFICIAL UPBEAT ON WESTERN  
SAHARA - BUT IS IT REAL ?

REF: STATE 88684

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROBERT FORD, REASON 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) MFA Secretary General (number two) Lamamra told Ambassador June 27 that he was hopeful the nascent UN-sponsored talks between Morocco and the Polisario might actually lead to real progress. Ambassador underlined that we hoped both Morocco and the Polisario would be realistic in the August round of talks. Both sides would have to be ready to accept compromises. Lamamra agreed. Ambassador then asked if Lamamra thought the Polisario would talk seriously with the Moroccans and accept the need to make concessions from the Polisario's current stance. Lamamra thought a moment and then opined that Polisario concessions might be possible but not until a third round of talks. Neither side wanted to be held responsible for seeing the talks break down, Lamamra noted. Above all, it was vital to keep the Moroccans and the Polisario in direct talks; he discounted the utility of proximity negotiations.

¶2. (C) Lamamra said the role of UN SRSG Van Walsum was especially important. He emphasized that Van Walsum needs to be bolder in injecting himself into the process. For example, he recommended that Van Walsum not hesitate to set the agenda for the August talks. (Lamamra doubted that the Polisario and Morocco themselves would be able to agree on an agenda if left only to themselves. He mused that if the August talks go well then Van Walsum might be able to ask each to prepare a suggested set of topics for a third round.) Lamamra added that Julien Hairston could provide useful advice to Van Walsum given his own diplomatic experience and time on the ground with MINURSO.

¶3. (SBU) Lamamra said he will likely attend the August talks. He offered to come to Washington in advance of those discussions to consult with the U.S. Government - estimating he could be in Washington around August 8.

¶4. (C) Comment: In a separate conversation June 25, Algerian MFA Counselor Abdallah Bali told Ambassador that the first round of Western Sahara talks in New York had gone as well as could be expected. Bali was skeptical, however, that the positions of Morocco and the Polisario were reconcilable. He saw no gameplan from the UN or anyone else to help bring them closer. Bali's remarks are far closer to the standard Algerian line and far closer also to the hard-line we find in Algerian newspapers with good contacts in the Algerian security and foreign policy establishment. Lamamra's upbeat

tone was surprising, therefore, and aimed perhaps at forestalling accusations that Algeria is not itself playing a positive role. Lamamra and Bali both have told us that they understand the credibility hit Algeria and the Polisario would suffer if they slam the door on the UN-sponsored talks.

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